Su 3

National Institute on Aging

NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

NOV 9 1982

U. S. GOVT. PUBS.
DEPOSITORY 376

Age Page

Considering Surgery?

Most people for whom elective (nonemergency) surgery is recommended are given time to think the matter over and review other options. Deciding whether or not to have an operation is difficult for anyone, but especially for the elderly. Normal changes that occur with age and diseases which are more common in later life, particularly heart ailments, may make surgery more risky for older people.

Although the following suggestions apply to anyone who is considering surgery, they are particularly important for the elderly.

- Begin by seeing your family doctor to find out about your illness and treatment choices. An internist, general practitioner, or family practitioner is likely to give equal attention to surgical and nonsurgical approaches to treatment. Consult a surgeon once you and your doctor have decided that surgery is a promising method of treatment.

- When choosing a surgeon, it is useful to find out if he or she has been certified by a surgical board (such as the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery or the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery). Surgeons who are board-certified have had a number of years of training in dealing with certain diseases and have passed the examinations for their specialty. Don't hesitate to call the doctor's office and ask for this information. Your state or local medical society and the hospital where the surgeon operates should also be able to verify his or her qualifications.

Another way of checking a surgeon's qualifications is to see if he or she is a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. The letters F.A.C.S. after the surgeon's name indicate that he or she has passed an evaluation of surgical training and skills as well as ethical fitness.

- Try to choose an experienced surgeon who operates on a regular basis (several times a week).

- If time permits, seek the advice of another qualified doctor. Getting a second opinion is a common medical practice that most doctors encourage. Don't be afraid to tell your surgeon that you want another opinion and would like your medical records forwarded to the second doctor. This can save time, money, and possible discomfort since tests you have already had may not need to be repeated if the second doctor has the results. For information on when and why you should consider getting a second opinion, write to the Health Care Financing Administration for the brochure *Thinking of Having Surgery?* The address is: Surgery, HHS, Washington, D.C. 20201.

To find a specialist in your area who can give you a second opinion, ask your doctor or call the government's toll-free number, (800) 638-6833.*

Ask the Right Questions

Before undergoing a surgical procedure, you will be asked to sign a statement giving consent for the operation. It is important that you discuss all of your concerns about your condition and the operation with your

* In Maryland, call (800) 492-6603.

(over, please)

HE 20.3861:

READEX FICHE

surgeon before you sign this statement. In most cases the surgeon will volunteer a great deal of information, but don't hesitate to ask any questions you still have. The following list might be helpful:

- What does the doctor say your problem is?
- What is the operation the doctor plans to do?
- What are the chances of survival without the operation?
- What are the chances of survival with the operation?
- Are there other forms of treatment that could be tried before surgery?
- What are the risks of surgery?
- How long would the recovery period be and what is involved?
- How much will the operation cost? Will your insurance cover all of the costs, including special tests?
- How much experience has the surgeon had with this particular operation?
- What percent of the operations were successful?
- Who will administer the anesthesia? A doctor or nurse-anesthetist who has experience treating the elderly?
- How will the operation affect your health and lifestyle? Are there any activities you will not be able to do after surgery?

For More Information

For a free series of pamphlets on "When You Need an Operation," write to the American College of Surgeons, Office of Public Information, 55 East Erie Street, Chicago, IL 60611.

Above all, be sure an operation is necessary and that the benefits outweigh the risks before you agree to undergo surgery.

A Note to Our Readers

In the 2½ years since the first *Age Page* was printed, we have published the 20 issues listed below:

- Accidents and the Elderly
- Arthritis Advice
- Considering Surgery?
- Constipation
- Crime and the Elderly
- Don't Take It Easy—Exercise!
- Finding Good Medical Care for Older Americans
- Food: Staying Healthy After 65
- Foot Care for Older People
- Heat, Cold, and Being Old
- High Blood Pressure: A Common But Controllable Disorder
- Minorities and How They Grow Old
- Safe Use of Medicines by Older People
- Senility: Myth or Madness?
- Sexuality in Later Life
- Skin: Getting the Wrinkles Out of Aging
- Taking Care of Your Teeth
- Urinary Incontinence
- What to do About Flu
- Who's Who in Health Care

Limited quantities of each *Age Page* are available by writing to: Age Page, National Institute on Aging, Building 31, Room 5C35, Bethesda, MD 20205.

As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

January 1983

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Public Health Service National Institutes of Health